

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 027886
ORIGIN OES-06

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EB-08 L-03 DODE-00 PM-04 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
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NSF - S. TOYE

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O 081414Z FEB 77

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 027886

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCLR, TGEN, CO

SUBJECT: ALPHA HELIX EXPEDITION

REF: A. STATE 304876; B. BOGOTA 00975; AND PREVIOUS

FOR AMBASSADOR SANCHEZ FROM LUERS

1. THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR OBTAINING GOC PERMISSION TO
CONDUCT THE ALPHA HELIX AMAZON EXPEDITION - PHASE VII, HAVE
REACHED AN IMPASSE. THE RESEARCH IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN
ON 17 MARCH 1977 AND THERE ARE SEVERAL REMAINING ISSUES
WHICH CANNOT BE RESOLVED BEFORE THAT DATE WITHOUT, IT WOULD
APPEAR, YOUR PERSONAL INTERVENTION. THE ISSUES ARE AS
FOLLOWS:

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PAGE 02 STATE 027886

A. THE GOC HAS INSISTED THAT DECREE 626, WHICH STATES THAT
30 PERCENT OF THE COST OF THE RESEARCH (A QUARTER MILLION
DOLLARS) INVOLVING ANTHROPOLOGY BE APPLIED TO THE ALPHA
HELIX PROJECT AND THAT THE GOC BE GIVEN THIS SUM BY THE U.S.
NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION FOR THE RIGHT TO CONDUCT THE
RESEARCH. AS FOR THE CHARACTER OF THE RESEARCH, THE U.S.
DOES NOT IN ANY CASE ACCEPT THE GOC DEFINITION OF THE

ALPHA HELIX-PHASE VII AS ANTHROPOLOGICAL. THE U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION INSISTS ALPHA HELIX PHASE VII IS NOT. THE MAJOR PART OF PHASE VII INVOLVES BIOLOGY AND BIOCHEMISRY.

B. PLANTS WILL BE COLLECTED AND ANALYZED ABOARD THE ALPHA HELIX. DR. RICHARD E. SCHULTES, DIRECTOR OF THE BOTANICAL MUSEUM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY, IS THE CHIEF SCIENTIST FOR PHASE VII AND HIS RESEARCH ORIGINALLY INVOLVED INTERVIEWING THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ABOUT THEIR CULTURE AND USE OF PLANTS. DR. SCHULTES HAS AGREED TO DELETE HIS PART OF THE RESEARCH INVOLVING CONTACT WITH THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE BUT WILL REMAIN CHIEF SCIENTIST AND HELP WITH THE BOTANICAL STUDIES. HOWEVER, THE GOC STILL INSISTS THAT THE RESEARCH IS ANTHROPOLOGICAL. THIS CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IN PART BECAUSE DR. SCHULTES HAS CONDUCTED ENTHNOBOTANICAL STUDIES IN COLOMBIA IN THE PAST HIS WORK IS WELL KNOWN. HIS PRESENCE ALONE MIGHT BE THE CAUSE FOR THE GOC STUBBORNNESS ON THIS ISSUE.

C. ADDITONALLY, THEY HAVE STATED THAT THEY WILL NEED 30 DAYS TO MAKE THEIR DECISION AFTER RECEIVING A NEW DESCRIPTION OF PHASE VII IN ADDITION TO REPORTS CONCERNING PHASE I, WHICH WAS ALSO CONDUCTED IN COLOMBIA. LOGISTICS REQUIRE THAT A GOC DECISION BE MADE BY 15 FEB.

D. THE GOC FEELSTHAT WE HAVE NOT FULFILLED AN AGREEMENT

TO PROVIDE A PRELIMINARY DATA REPORT FOR PHASE I, AN
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PAGE 03 STATE 027886

ACCURATE CHART FOR PHASE VII, AND A COMPLETE DESCRIPTION OF PHASE VII. A MISUNDERSTANDING EXISTED IN THAT WE BELIEVED A PRELIMINARY REPORT WAS NOT REQUIRED UNTIL COMPLETION OF THE WORK IN COLOMBIA-PHASE VII. THE GOC UNDERSTOOD A REPORT WOULD BE PROVIDED 60 DAYS AFTER PHASE I. A PRELIMINARY REPORT AND DATA ARE NOW IN THE MAIL TO THE DEPT FROM MIT AND US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND WE WILL FORWARD EXPEDITIOUSLY. A NEW DESCRIPTION OF PHASE VII WAS CABLED TO THE EMBASSY ON 7 FEB. IT REFLECTS DR. SCHULTES NEW ROLE AND THE CANCELLATION OF THE RESEARCH INVOLVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

2. THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOC HAVE BEEN GOING ON SINCE SEPTEMBER 1975. DURING THIS TIME THERE HAVE SURFACED RUMORS OF THE ALPHA HELIX BEING ON A CIA MISSION AND ANOTHER SUGGESTING IT WAS SEARCHING FOR URANIUM. THESE RUMORS ARE TOTALLY FALSE; HOWEVER, NSF FEARS CANCELLATION OF THE RESEARCH AT THIS STAGE BY US MIGHT TEND TO REINFORCE THESE RUMORS AND GIVE GOC OPPORTUNITY TO CHARGE THAT US

OPTED OUT WHEN "TRUE" NATURE OF ACTIVITIES WAS DISCOVERED.
FOR THIS REASON, NSF WANTS A YES OR NO FROM THE GOC.
CANCELLATIONMIGHT BE THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE UNLESS A DECISION
CAN BE MADE SOON. PERSONALITIES HAVE ALSO PLAYED A PART
IN THAT DR. SCHULTES HAS CONTACTED SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES
AND INVITED THEIR PARTICIPATION ON THE CRUISE. SOME OF
THE GOC AGENCY HEADS HAVE RESENTED THISAND RESERVED
THE RIGHT TO SELECT THEIR OWN OFFICIAL PARTICIPANTS,
WHICH WE FULLY SUPPORT. HOWEVER, THE ILL FEELINGS
PERSIST EVEN THOUGH THE GOC IS MAKING THE SELECTIONS.

3. DEPARTMENT IS SATISFIED THAT THIS PROBLEM AND THE
ISSUES SURROUNDING IT HAVE BEEN TAKEN AS FAR AS THEY CAN
AT LEVELS OTHER THAN THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THAT
IT IS NOW APPROPRIATE FOR YOU TO TAKE CASE TO FOREIGN
MINISTER. THE GOC IS BEING REPRESENTED BY A MULTI-
INSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE COMPRISED OF SCIENTISTS WHO ARE
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PAGE 04 STATE 027886

INCLINED TO DENY PERMISSION FOR REASONS STATED ABOVE. THE
TIME CONSTRAINT MAKES THE GOC SCHEME FOR DECISION SELF
DEFEATING. WE FEAR THE HARM THAT CAN BE DONE TO THE
REPUTATION OF US SCIENCE INTERNATIONALLY SHOULD WE BE
FORCED TO CANCEL WITHOUT A GOC DECISION. THERE ARE REAL
BENEFITS TO THE GOC AS DESCRIBED IN PREVIOUS CABLES.
MANY COLOMBIAN SCIENTISTS SUPPORT THE PROJECT BUT THEY
ARE NOT REPRESENTED ON THE MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE.
THE APPLICATION OF DECREE 626 (30 PERCENT CLAUSE) IS AN
INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEM WHICH WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO
CHANGE OUR VIEW.

4. NSF STATES THAT THE DEADLINE OF 15 FEB. IS FIRM IF
THE FUNDING FOR PHASE VII IS TO BE SAVED FOR USE IN
SOME OTHER AREA. DEPT. WOULD BE HAPPY TO PROVIDE

ADDITIONAL INFO YOU MAY NEED.

5. I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU COULD SEE THE FOREIGN
MINISTER ON THIS MATTER. IF YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEMS WITH
THIS PLEASE LET US KNOW.
VANCE

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NNN

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